

## **CONFLICTS EMERGING AS STRAND STRUGGLES**

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Metro/Region

Maureen Dezell, Globe Staff

711 Words

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B.1

English

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Without a cash infusion of at least \$100,000 from the city of Boston, Dorchester's storied Strand Theatre could be forced to shut down within the next few months, says Juan Evereteze, board chairman of the struggling Uphams Corner theater.

But the city, which owns the 85-year-old theater and leases it to the M. Harriet McCormack Center for the Arts, is unlikely to hand over a significant sum to the Strand any time soon, according to Charlotte Golar Richie, director of Boston's Department of Neighborhood Development.

Responding to the threat of lawsuits, charges of financial mismanagement, and allegations of questionable business practices at the Strand, Mayor Thomas M. Menino called two weeks ago for a broad-based review of the nonprofit organization, whose lease with the city runs out in June.

"They have serious issues with their deficit," said Golar Richie. (Strand management says it has a \$15,000 deficit on its \$450,000 budget.) "And we are looking very closely at management and operations of the theater."

As city officials comb through receipts and records, and meet with Strand managers to try to determine a survival strategy for the organization, internal tumult that began shortly after Victoria Jones was named executive director two years ago has grown.

"The Strand has gone downhill since Vicki Jones was hired," said Brian "Sideshow" Isaacs, who quit his job yesterday after four years as the Strand's technical director. Isaacs said he resigned despite the urging of Strand supporters such as Hal Cohen, president of Uphams Corner Main Streets, who described him this week as "the most knowledgeable person at the Strand right now."

"No one at the Strand anymore knows anything about theater," said Isaacs.

His departure is the latest in a string of turnovers among house managers, box office managers, and program directors, some of whom have been replaced by Jones's family and friends. Her daughter, Lisa, is the Strand marketing and operations manager.

Jones said on Wednesday that the Strand will survive and thrive, provided it gets some additional support from the city, which has already spent \$1.2 million in capital

improvements at the theater since she took charge.

But the organization still owes more than \$20,000 in utility bills, and another \$20,000 to the Boston Fire Department for providing fire detail services last year to the Strand.

An Emmy Award-winning television producer who had never run an organization as large as the Strand, Jones took over at a particularly troubled time for not-for-profit organizations. It was the aftermath of Sept. 11, when the national economy hit the skids.

The director insists she is not responsible for the Strand's significant decline in bookings, nor for the drop in contributed income that has forced her to cut back on and cancel the Strand's signature teen and youth programs. "I inherited the mismanagement and neglect of this theater that goes back 15 years," Jones said.

According to city officials, however, the Strand operated in the black until 2002. Current problems surfaced over the Christmastime run of BalletRox, which has performed "Urban Nutcracker" at the Strand for three years. The ballet's executive director, Tony Williams, at one point threatened to file criminal charges after the Strand bounced a \$15,170 check to his dance company earlier this year. The Strand repaid Williams for the amount of the check last month, and Williams dropped that threat.

But he said he will go forward with a civil suit against the management and board, seeking compensation for legal fees, court costs, loss of income, and libel.

Regardless of what happens with the investigation, the future of the theater itself is not in jeopardy, city officials said.

"In the event that present Strand management and board members are unable to continue to operate the theater, the city is committed to finding an alternative way to maintain programming at the theater," a spokesman for Golar Richie said.

Caption: Mayor Thomas M. Menino has called for a broad-based review of the nonprofit organization that leases the Strand Theatre in Dorchester. Its contract with the city runs out in June. / GLOBE STAFF PHOTO / BILL GREENE

## **FORMER AOL EXECUTIVE TO LEAD MAYOR'S STRAND TASK FORCE**

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Living

Maureen Dezell, Globe Staff

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Mayor Thomas M. Menino said yesterday that he has tapped Boston attorney and philanthropist Kenneth J. Novack, the former vice chairman of AOL, to lead a task force that will determine the future of Dorchester's embattled Strand Theatre.

Menino decided last week to set up a task force to augment a City Hall investigation of the 85-year-old Uphams Corner landmark, a nonprofit theater and community arts center owned by the city and leased to the M. Harriet McCormack Center for the Arts. Responding to the threat of lawsuits, charges of financial mismanagement, and allegations of questionable business practices, the mayor last month launched a review of the Strand's management, whose 25-year lease with the city ends in June.

"I want to make sure that we have a plan in place to make the Strand what it should be - to return it to its former glory," said Menino.

"We need to be aggressive on this and find innovative ways of making sure there is nothing questionable going on," said the mayor. "We need to look at the management structure we have in place and to see if they have the skills and financial wherewithal to fulfill their responsibilities."

Novack, who stepped down in December as vice chairman of what is now Time Warner Inc., has served on the boards of several Boston-area nonprofits, including New England Medical Center and the Museum of Science.

Maureen Dezell can be reached at [dezell@globe.com](mailto:dezell@globe.com).



# DORCHESTER COMMUNITY COMMENT

## Commentary

at

## Where We Stand at the Strand

BY VICTORIA JONES

It has been an interesting two years since this administration came on board with its mission to see to it that the Strand Theatre become an economic anchor despite a severe downturn in the economy.

I think the negative articles in *The Boston Globe* and *The Bay State Banner* have missed the point. The Strand should have always been an economic anchor in this community, but until the present board and present administration came onboard, the theatre was severely underutilized, due in large part because of the physical condition of the theatre.

How can one rent a space during the critical summer months with no air conditioning? That was the case for last five years. Under the present administration that problem was addressed within a month and this past September the air conditioning was finally installed, and the theatre for the first time in several years is completely booked in August and filling up in June and July. The Strand will be the site of a convention event in July. We spent over a year in making sure the theatre was a part of the important event that the community will be invited to.

The cosmetic renovations that have been made are in part due to management's tireless campaign to get paint and equipment donated to the theatre. The theatre also received a thorough cleaning for the first time in years.

Let me address the perception of fiscal mismanagement. In the past The Strand primarily relied on contributed revenue, meaning foundations and corporations. The Strand never had an endowment fund or a private capital funding source. We had to develop that, which is in the works and takes two to three years to realize.

It is inaccurate, and if the reporter from the *Banner* had done his homework, he would have known that although the city allotted the theatre a million dollars for capital expenses, those dollars were given directly to the companies in charge of the renovations. The reporters both from the *Banner* and the *Boston Globe* were invited to come to the Strand and see it for themselves, but declined. If the *Banner's* reporter, who claimed the place was filthy had taken the time, he would have seen how our young adults from the Cape Verdean community have kept the place almost spotless. In fact, over the past couple of years I have invited the *Globe's* arts reporter to the Strand, which she has declined.

As everyone knows, 9/11 was the catalyst for an economic adjustment and to say that funding of this sort stopped because I came on board is irresponsible and not true. Ask any non-profit dealing with the arts: those that are still opened and operating and they will tell you that their sources are either gone or have experienced severe cutbacks. Ask Bird Street, Vine Street and St. Mary's after school and summer programs about their financial challenges and the partnership we are developing with them to keep our kids

programs alive. In fact, we have never charged the kids a dime to participate in our after school and summer programs.

The Strand relied on a finite source of contributed revenue. Just weeks after I began my employment at The Strand, several funding sources told me they were not going to fund arts organizations as they had in the past. So what I have had to do is find other sources that were never courted by the past administration.

Within weeks of my arrival, I knew that earned revenue should be the primary goal in keeping the doors opened, and getting the city to come onboard in getting the necessary renovations to the tune of over five million dollars completed, so the theatre could be competitive with other theatres in the area.

When I came onboard, I had to upgrade a 15 year-old computer system, install a new phone system, because the existing one literally broke down, use scarce operating capital to upgrade an alarm system, among other things. The accounting system was done completely by hand, as has been the box office, which is going to be upgraded. I spent the better part of 18 months writing a grant that would pave the way for getting The Strand landmark status and much needed dollars for capital renovations. This important milestone should have been done years ago. I am still working on it because of challenges I face in red tape.

My administration - including Board President Juan Evereteze, Joyce Mitchell-Williams, Robert Haas and other board members - have spent numerous hours and their spare time with our new accountant to figure out ways to turn the ratios around and in the past five months we have seen a 26 percent jump in earned revenue. This 26 percent jump can be attributed solely to the work our operations manager, Lisa Jones, has done. The projections show that we should be completely self-sufficient in the next 18 months.

In the past two years we have formed partnerships that never existed, with companies like Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra, Clear Channel, the Boston Jewish Film Festival, the Huntington Theatre, the list goes on. We also want to make this theatre state of the arts for films. Miramax Films and other companies have signed on to showcase foreign films, as have production companies wanting to bring quality Broadway shows to Dorchester. We recognize the importance of all the communities living in Dorchester and Uphams Corner. Our church services are in Spanish, the groundbreaking presentation of our five part Latino Film Series, our ongoing Haitian film outlet and the recent MLK Symphony presented by Pro Arte, where the attendance was over 60 per cent Caucasian.

The road to a far-reaching vision is never easy, but all of us believe in The Strand for its economic potential and the belief that this community deserves a modern, up-to-date, state of the art theatre that the community can be proud of.

Victoria Jones is the executive director of the Strand Theatre.



**Dorchester Reporter**

**March 25, 2004**

# **Mayoral Task Force Inspects Strand Theatre**

**By Jim O'Sullivan**

A mayor-appointed task force director visited the Strand Theatre with city officials Monday, touring the Columbia Road facility in an effort to identify means of rescuing an 85-year-old neighborhood institution from financial ruin.

On Monday of last week, Mayor Thomas M. Menino included the Strand on a list of Boston venues that will partake in the looming Democratic National Convention, where the Strand will host a pre-convention party for the Indiana delegation on Sunday, July 25. On Tuesday, he announced the appointment of Kenneth J. Novack, a former vice chairman of AOL, to head a task force to salvage the theater.

The mayor called any connection between the two selections coincidental, but the troubled Uphams Corner landmark has seized high priority at City Hall.

City-owned, and leased by the M. Harriet McCormack Center for the Arts, the Strand has stumbled into a harsh financial picture, and officials have said it could close. The non-profit organization's lease of the building expires June 30, and Menino said in a telephone interview with the Reporter on Wednesday that a new tenant is possible.

"That's one of the things we're looking at," Menino said.

While neighborhood sources say the city has received unsolicited offers from the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, a Brazil-based religious group, and the city's assessing department values the building and lot at \$1.3 million, both city and Strand officials profess to aim to keep the theater open.

Juan Evereteze, chairman of the McCormack board and a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development employee, said he is optimistic about the Strand's survival. Evereteze, who stressed that his HUD role "has nothing to do with" his Strand post, said he had spoken over the phone with Novack.

Evereteze said he remains "unclear" on specifics of the task force's plan, but speculated that the walking tour would help identify physical shortcomings, while an ongoing examination of financial records could bring to light trouble spots. Menino said he planned to announce the remaining members of the task force later this week.

"[Novack] is an individual I've known for a lot of years who has an interest in our city," Menino said. "When you have a professional who's looking to step forward and help you, you ask him to get involved and help you."

"[Novack] seemed pretty apologetic about the way this thing has turned out," Evereteze said, referring to press accounts that have depicted an "antagonistic" relationship between Strand and city administrators.

The Strand's woes became public early last month, when a Bay State Banner exposé blasted the theater, charging inept management and cronyism hires. The Banner article revealed the Strand had bounced a \$15,000 check to BalletRox, which stages the "Urban Nutcracker." The Strand paid the debt after being sued.

In response, the Strand has questioned the Banner's motives and decried press coverage of the situation. In a guest commentary piece in last week's Reporter, Strand executive director Victoria Jones said a Boston Globe arts reporter had declined invitations to visit the theater.

Maureen Dezell, the reporter, said Tuesday, "It's just simply not true." Dezell said she had called the Strand "dozens of times" while investigating her first story on the Strand, which the Globe published Feb. 26. On Wednesday, March 17, after the Reporter had gone to press, she went to the Strand and met with Jones, Dezell said.

Critics of the Strand's leadership accuse Jones of nepotism; Jones selected her daughter, Lisa, to run management and operations at the theater. Jones defended her choice, saying her daughter had raised \$106,000 in earned - as opposed to contributed - revenue, as part of the Strand's strategy of drawing more commercial capital.

"Without her, the Strand may have had a tough time staying open because of the stop in the flow of contributed revenue," Jones said. She said allegations of mismanagement fail to consider the fiscal challenges faced by a non-profit theater, and charged the city with neglecting the property in the past. She said the theater needs a top-to-bottom paint job and maintenance work on several doors.

"I just want to say that the theater would probably require five or six million dollars. So far, the city has probably spent a million" since she took over in 2002, Jones said. Insisting she was encouraged by the task force's reaction during its tour, Jones said, "The city now recognizes that the Strand has been neglected and is now trying to take steps to try to correct the physical plant."

"If she wants to blame me, that's OK, but I know something about management," Menino said, charging that Jones's complaints about not receiving fiscal help rang hollow because she had not asked for any. "She's looking for scapegoats," Menino said. "I'm not looking for a scapegoat. I want to fix the problem. To me, the simple things send a message: light bulbs, vacuuming. Is that my responsibility?"

The mayor said city officials changed 150 light bulbs in the Strand ceiling earlier this week. Menino said the task force he would announce this week would include neighborhood representatives, as well as management and theater experts. The task force's first step, he said, would be to "put a business plan together." He said the city's fiscal year 2004 budget earmarked \$750,000 for the Strand, but refused to speculate about how much money the city would commit in the future.

He said personnel changes remained a possibility, but are not a priority for the committee. "There's no agenda here," Menino said.

Hal Cohen, president of Uphams Corner Main Streets, said the Strand is likely to survive under Jones's direction, "but there has to be a few changes."

"They certainly can run it, but it has to be a little more producer-friendly," Cohen said.

"I haven't seen an openness to constructive criticism ... on the part of Victoria and Lisa," Cohen said. Jones said her regime has produced community partnerships and programs for children.

"We're turning the theater around and we're looking at it like no one's looked at it before," Jones said. "For me, it was as if the building was dormant when I came in, and I sort of had to re-ignite some energy, and get people excited about the Strand."

## **TASK FORCE ON STRAND THEATRE TO BE NAMED**

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Maureen Dezell, Globe Staff

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Mayor Thomas M. Menino is expected to announce today the membership of a special task force on the future of Dorchester's troubled Strand Theatre.

Last week Menino named a Boston lawyer and philanthropist, Kenneth J. Novack, the former vice chairman of AOL, as chairman of a committee that will consider plans and programs for the 85-year-old Uphams Corner landmark. The nonprofit theater and community arts center is owned by the city and leased to the M. Harriet McCormack Center for the Arts, whose 25-year-old rental agreement expires in June.

The mayor's office is investigating management policies and practices at the McCormack Center, which has come under fire this year from local producers of "Urban Nutcracker" and other events, and from Uphams Corner community and civic leaders, who say the financially strapped Strand is engaged in questionable business and programming practices.

The mission of the task force will be distinct from the city investigation, both Novack and a spokesman for the mayor said yesterday.

"Our job is to focus on the future, and to develop a vision for the Strand, and to help the mayor [determine] the best possible partner to achieve that vision," Novack said in a telephone interview.

Along with Novack, the eight-member task force is to include entrepreneur and community activist Ed Dugger of UNC Partners; Denise Gonsalves of the Cape Verdean Community Task Force; former Strand director Geri Guardino, now executive director of Boston's annual First Night celebration; Jose Mateo, founding artistic director of Jose Mateo's Ballet Theatre; Boston public school teacher Magnolia Monroe-Gordon; Barr Foundation executive Klare Shaw; and Tyra Sidberry, director of the Diversity Initiative.

Novack said he hopes to convene the first task force meeting next week.

Maureen Dezell can be reached at dezell@globe.com.

## **HOUSE OF BLUES PLAGUED BY DEBT, CUTBACKS, AND COMPLAINTS, THE VENERABLE STRAND THEATRE FACES THE MUSIC**

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Living

Maureen Dezell, Globe Staff

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The Strand Theatre marquee glowed with promise on an early May evening in 2002, when a who's who of local political, foundation, and civic swells welcomed newly named Strand executive director Victoria Jones to the Uphams Corner theater.

Well-wishers lit up a reception in the vintage lobby, and Mayor Thomas M. Menino kicked off an upbeat program in the shabby but storied auditorium, where performances by the Boston Gay Men's Chorus and the Strand Teen Players, among others, were interspersed with political endorsements of Jones's grand plans for the Strand.

Hopes ran high that night for Jones, a warm, engaging woman whose 20 years as a community-based television producer had won her friends and admirers throughout the city. Her public debut was a harbinger, she said, of the eclectic mix of performances and people that she would bring to the Strand. Jones promised to turn the then- 83-year-old vaudeville and movie house, which is owned by the City of Boston and leased to the nonprofit M. Harriet McCormack Center for the Arts, into a vital arts and community center, an economic anchor.

Less than two years later, the Strand's books are soaked in red ink. The Strand's 1,400-seat auditorium is dark on most evenings, and it droops with inactivity during the daytime. Paint is peeling, chairs are broken, and a city maintenance crew recently replaced 150 dead light bulbs that had been left in their sockets.

Says longtime Dorchester resident Ellie Jackson: "The door is always closed, and nobody answers the phones."

The Strand's calendar of upcoming performances and community events is small and shrinking, and community and youth programs, including the signature Strand Teen Players, have been disbanded or drastically downsized.

Meanwhile, youth events that have been planned, booked, and billed at the Strand tend to be short-lived.

A series of Friday-night under-21 parties was canceled this month after Boston police, responding to neighbors' complaints about noise and disruption, investigated a Feb. 27 gathering and cited the Strand and event organizers for



violations of fire, safety, and entertainment codes, according to a Police Department spokeswoman.

The Strand box office is closed more often than it is open, much to the chagrin of local producers such as Roxbury entrepreneur Charles Muhammad of C. C. Sounds, a mobile entertainment company, and First Choice Limousine Service.

Muhammad is scheduled to present his eighth annual Mother's Day Tribute, two gospel and soul concerts, May 9 at the Strand.

He has paid his rental fee and a bill for sound and technical assistance, and he's also written a personal \$300 check to Strand operations manager Lisa Jones, Victoria Jones's daughter, for a rental commission. The commission fee is not mentioned in the Strand's rental brochures or standard contracts, or on its website.

Muhammad's contract with the Strand includes box-office sales and marketing, so when Muhammad heard from customers that the box office was never open, he complained to Lisa Jones.

"She told me to put my own person in the box office," Muhammad said on Saturday, sounding incredulous.

Lisa Jones has not responded to requests for comment. Victoria Jones, who initially denied that her daughter had received commissions, defended the practice in conversations earlier this month. "We have to increase our earned income," she explained. "If we bring earned income into the theater, we deserve to get a small commission. Lisa has brought \$106,000 in earned income into the theater."

Muhammad said he isn't taking chances with his tickets. He plans to sell them at a few outlets, including African Roots, the vendor of Bob Marley posters, crafts, T-shirts, and snacks that sets up shop in the Strand's outdoor foyer.

But that may not be possible for long. African Roots' presence violates the terms of the McCormack Center's lease with the City of Boston, which expires in June.

Menino takes action

Last month, the mayor who two years before had welcomed Jones's arrival at the McCormack Center, which appointed her,

ordered a broad-based City Hall investigation of the organization's management policies and practices. So far, the review has turned up evidence of tens of thousands of dollars in outstanding bills, lease infractions, and violations of city licensing and entertainment ordinances.

A mayoral task force was appointed last week to make recommendations for the future of the Strand once the McCormack Center's 25-year lease runs out on June

30.

The city has told Jones and her board that it will not renew the current lease, according to a spokesman for the mayor. It is highly unlikely, he added, that the current management team will figure in the task force plans for a future Strand.

Jones, who said last week that she looks forward to working with the task force, did not respond to a recent series of phone and e-mail messages regarding the termination of the lease. Board chairman Juan Evereteze said he would not comment until he discusses the matter with Jones and the board tomorrow.

Jones blames a lack of support from the city and local foundations, coupled with the economic downturn, for the sorry state of the Strand. She sees herself as a victim of unfair press and bad publicity that have eclipsed her signal accomplishments: installing a much-needed air conditioning system, seeking landmark status for the Strand, and setting up classes and after-school programs for neighborhood children. What's more, she insists, her problems are not of her own making. She inherited a "disaster," she said, when she took over the Strand.

Yet by the standards of municipal arts support in Boston, the Strand enjoys privileged status. The city provides the Strand its facility free of charge, along with roughly \$850,000 for capital expenses each year. That is an insufficient sum, according to Jones.

The Strand and the Boston Center for the Arts are the only arts facilities owned by the city, and only a small handful receive any capital support. No Boston group gets operating money from the city.

Jones said that "arts funding went kaput just as I got here, and no foundations fund the arts right now."

"This is an extremely difficult time and funding climate for nonprofit organizations," agreed Ann McQueen, program officer for the Boston Foundation, a community philanthropic organization. "A lot of nonprofit organizations are under a great deal of strain. But when they see revenue drop or unpaid bills piling up, they cut back expenses, they seek other sources of revenue, they develop innovative programs that will get grants."

The Boston Foundation funded the Strand many times in the past, and it continues to write grants to arts groups, said McQueen. But the Strand's most recent applications, she added, "frankly, were not compelling" and were not funded.

Hal Cohen, president of Uphams Corner Main Streets, an umbrella community group, praises Jones's efforts to keep the Strand afloat during extremely turbulent times. "She is energetic and extremely dedicated, and there have been some physical improvements there since she came," said Cohen.

But Cohen, like many local arts leaders, disputes Jones's claim that her predecessors lacked vision and that she inherited a passel of problems when she arrived at the Strand. When Geri Guardino, now executive director of First Night,

ran the Strand between 1989 and 1997, the annual operating budget grew from \$138,000 to more than \$500,000, according to tax records. Guardino established the Strand Teen Players, a youth employment program, and a young producers program, and she raised money to refurbish the Strand marquee.

What's more, the Strand ran in the black throughout Guardino's tenure and that of her successor, interim director Joyce Bishop, public records show.

The current board has not filed IRS returns since fiscal year 2001, though Evereteze said it plans to do so this week. Meanwhile, he estimates, the Strand is running a deficit of between \$10,000 and \$20,000 on a \$450,000 budget.

City officials who are involved in the Strand investigation, however, say the organization is in far more financial hot water than it acknowledges. The McCormack Center owes tens of thousands of dollars to the Boston Fire Department, former employees, suppliers, and vendors. New England School Services, which installed safety doors at the Strand more than a year ago, recently informed the city that the company never received full payment.

A string of frustrated employees have left the Strand since Jones took charge. The latest is Brian "Sideshow" Isaacs, the Strand's technical director, who left this month after four years there, upset over "how badly the Joneses have managed that place," he said.

#### Disgruntled producers

News that local producers were fed up with the Strand surfaced early this year in The Bay State Banner, which was also the first to report that Tony Williams, artistic director of BalletRox, planned to sue the Strand after it bounced a \$15,000 check for money owed to BalletRox for "Urban Nutcracker," which was presented at the Strand during the past three holiday seasons.

The Strand eventually covered the amount of the check - which is for less money than Williams maintains he is owed. He is pursuing a civil action against the Strand seeking compensation for his legal costs and for libel over a letter that Lisa Jones has been circulating to public officials and arts leaders and funders.

Victoria Jones dismisses Williams's complaints about what she characterizes as an isolated incident. "He got his money. What more does he want?" she said.

Williams and Muhammad are not the only disgruntled promoters calling for changes at the McCormack Center. "The Strand is the most unprofessionally run building I have ever encountered," said Bill Blumenreich, a concert promoter and owner of the Comedy Connection, who booked a Boney James jazz concert at the Strand in Oct. 2002. He said he found the management "inept, inefficient, and unresponsive.

"Never in my life have I experienced anything like this. They couldn't keep a ticket count. They couldn't run a box office," he said. "The numbers would change from day to day - and that was when you could get numbers of tickets from them,

because it took Victoria Jones days to return phone calls. We lost a ton of money. And then we had to threaten to sue to get paid."

Blumenreich said he was appalled to learn that the Strand received money from the City of Boston. He didn't bother complaining about his experience, he said, because he assumed the city endorsed the operating style at the McCormack Center.

Menino, however, has asked his task force to develop a new management, marketing, and programming plan for the Strand by the end of June.

Maureen Dezell can be reached at [dezell@globe.com](mailto:dezell@globe.com).



## **DRAMA IN DORCHESTER**

Editorial

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The Boston Globe

A.10

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MISMANAGEMENT has strip ped the sparkle from the historic Strand Theatre in Dorchester. The nonprofit venue is ideally situated for developing and showcasing new talent from Boston's neighborhoods. Instead, it is descending into artistic and economic torpor.

The city-owned Strand popped with excitement throughout the 1990s. The former vaudeville and movie theater in Uphams Corner became known as the hottest venue for visiting Haitian performers and top-of-the-line gospel acts. The Strand Teen players mounted legendary shows. School groups from the suburbs found their way to performances of the urban Nutcracker. Some young people gave up the drama of Boston's streets for opportunities to perform Shakespeare at the Strand.

While special in many ways, the Strand is also a traditional cultural organization that requires competent administration, reliable maintenance, and trusted partnerships with producers, funders, and vendors. All those areas have been wanting under director Victoria Jones, who took over in 2002. The Boston Foundation has rejected the group's recent grant request. And producers of everything from comedy to classical ballet say they have lost confidence in management's ability to pay its bills and run a box office. The Strand is in great need of new executive leadership and an expanded, energized board.

Many cultural organizations are struggling in the current economy. But the Strand is more fortunate than most. The city-owned building is leased without charge to the nonprofit M. Harriet McCormack Center for the Arts, which operates the theater. Eager to keep the arts flourishing in Boston's comeback neighborhoods, the city has allocated more than \$1 million for capital improvements during the past three years and provides more than \$80,000 annually for utilities. Yet the building looks shabby, and the calendar of events is shrinking.

The Strand's lease expires at the end of June. No one in city government appears amused by the McCormack Center's operating deficit, so it is unlikely that the group will be reprieved. That's show business.

A city-appointed task force is set to begin deliberations on the future of the Strand. It won't need to look back too many years for a successful model. The Strand under former managers accomplished much with a modicum of money and a lot of trust. The theater and performers who appeared there split costs and box office receipts equally, to everyone's benefit. Young people who came of artistic age at the Strand returned often to help the institution grow.

Funders and audiences haven't abandoned the Strand. Everyone who has enjoyed a show there or understands its cultural importance to the city is rooting for the

theater's comeback. But that resurgence won't take place until local scouts discover the true headliner - a dynamic new arts administrator.